

Dear Parents/ Guardians,

We are celebrating the end of the Spring term and before we know it we will enjoy an Easter break and only six more weeks before summer assessments and State Exams begin for the Junior & Senior Cycle students of 2023!

I wanted to take an opportunity to keep you informed of school developments and request your support to better manage a few areas of school life that cause a little concern, at times:

### **School Developments:**

The funding for improvement work to **replace 288 windows** has been secured and tendered so we await news very soon for a start date. The work is complex due to our proximity to Bellew's castle and the Georgian Convent House but Niall Smith Architects, the firm who arranged the remedial works after the fire, have the work in hand.

Further work is planned to increase & future-proof our electricity supply with **a new substation** on site. Exciting plans are underway as part of **The Safe Routes to School project**, in conjunction with Louth County Council, to improve pedestrian, cycling, bus and car access to the area as we all know the danger present at the Castleblayney Rd entrance, Mill Road and Bellewsbridge Rd when students are arriving and leaving the local schools.

The Board of Management has been asked to consider opening an **Autism Spectrum Disorder or ASD specific special class for September 2024**. We are working closely with the Department of Education, Building Department, to explore how the convent building might be refurbished to accommodate special classes and other school projects when the space is vacated over the next number of months. It will be the end of an era not to have St Louis sisters next door and we will really miss their gentle presence and important prayers when they migrate to other convents in Dublin or Monaghan in 2024. We offer them heartfelt gratitude for all their important work since the school was founded, in Dundalk, in 1950.

In the area of **Learning & Teaching** we continue to access as many opportunities as we can to promote excellence and support the fullest development of all students. We joined the **DEIS programme in March 2022** and we are really witnessing the benefits of the extra support to which we are now entitled. A new **Home School Community Liaison role** was established in September 2022 and **Ms Marie Meehan** has visited almost 150 homes, so far, offering parents a listening ear and any necessary support. Marie's warmth and empathy is boundless and her work is making a valuable contribution to the lives of our St Louis families. In addition, a **School Completion Officer** was also appointed in February 2023, **Ms Aoife Gonnely**, is proving to be a wonderful addition to the school staff, she is with us 26 hours per week and works with a number of students ensuring they stay at school and participate as fully as possible to maximise their potential. The DEIS programme also increased the hours of Guidance Counsellors from 16 to 40 hours per week, another necessary support for all students, especially those still feeling the impact of the pandemic on their social, emotional and academic progress.

### **Digital Technology for learning**

We continue to invest in books and digital resources for students and staff to ensure our St Louis students are prepared for the fast-paced digital world of work where skills like critical thinking and team-working will be vital in all roles, going forward. Quite a number of European students have been joining the school for TY & 5th - Ireland is an attractive destination to improve their English & other skills since Brexit! These students are independent, highly academic and self-directed, certainly wonderful role-models for our existing students. Their capacity with digital technology demonstrates why it's so important for our students to be digitally literate to compete in the global marketplace.

### **Parental support**

An area where we need your support is in the area of compliance with school rules around the managing of mobile phones and the more recent phenomenon of vaping. Toilet cubicles are being used as places to congregate during breaks **to access smartphones** and in some cases, **to vape**. We are concerned about the health implications of nicotine addiction and the phones present certain issues around **cyberbullying, recording others, without permission and contacting home without alerting staff, in advance**. All of these behaviours create incidents to investigate and sanction, taking valuable time away from our core work of learning & teaching. Some students are also **breaking toilet seats** in an attempt to sit up on cisterns to avoid detection or vandalising property while loitering in cubicles. We have increased supervision but would certainly benefit from parental support to reinforce the impact of these negative behaviours.

### **Encouraging attendance at whole-school events and ceremonies.**

We look forward to a series of school community events over the next few months: **Multicultural Day on March 31st; Awards ceremonies on May 18th & 19th, TY Graduation and the end of year Mass on Friday 19th May and Graduation Mass & Ceremony on Tuesday 23rd May.**

We want to encourage full participation by all students in these events and do not want anyone to feel excluded so we welcome all, regardless of ethnicity, faith or belief to all these events. As a Catholic school we seek to promote a sense of belonging and respect for all students and families but this is only achieved when we actually come together as a diverse community, strong in our own beliefs but also willing to embrace difference. There has been a growing practice of students leaving school or opting out of these gatherings and we want parents to reconsider this approach and consider permitting students to join us as guests without any fear of indoctrination. **Feeling connected to others is one of the key indicators of personal wellbeing and educational success for young people in a world that grows increasingly divided. We would be obliged if you could support us in this important work.**

### **New school App**

On the theme of connection & communication we plan to launch a new school App after Easter to improve communication with parents, especially in the area of parents alerting the school about

attendance. The App is a one-stop shop for all school business, you will be able to access VSWARE through the App and everything should work better than the current system

This new school app is called “St Louis Dundalk” - please search for this in your App/Play store on your personal device and follow the prompts to register as a parent/guardian on this system. It is important that you click “allow push notifications” when registering so that you get notified of important updates and requests as we won’t be using texts to communicate. Please see your email /social media for further instructions and helpful videos on the features of the app.

We are hoping parents will download the App as soon as possible as the **launch date is Tuesday 18th April 2023.**

Finally, I want to thank you for your continued support. We had opportunities to meet many of you during our annual parent-teacher meetings and at the recent TY Musical. We are grateful for high levels of attendance at these school events and remind you that we are happy to hear from you if you have any concerns or suggestions for improvement. We know that successful partnership with parents is vital for the on-going success of all our St Louis girls.

Michelle Dolan  
Principal  
25th March 2023